3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42
[P.392] MAYURBHANJ

APPENDIX I

SEX LIFE OF THE SANTAL

121 In course of the previous chapters, we have given the readers an idea of the Santal's life in general. We feel, however, that to probe deeply into the instinctive principles that govern the life of the tribe, we should deal with their sex-life in some detail. Rev. Verrier Elwin in his "The Baiga" and Dr. Firth in his account of the Tikopia have given admirable glimpses of this side of the tribes they have reviewed and knowing well how in these days, anthropologists like to get acquainted with the sprouting and development of the sex-instinct, with the scientist's belief that "where the sex is impure there are no flowers in nature," we take courage in both hands to place before the reader the results of our investigations amongst the Mayurbhanj Santals on the subject.

The dawn of the instinct

831 842 [176] "Children are equipped with a complete phallic knowledge by Cando Boṅga (Supreme Deity). It is ordained by him as to whether a man will have progeny or not; so we find some men are denied children, although they mate like others," said an old Santal to us. They want children; they like children. Overpopulation, a dismal apprehension

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42
MAYURBHANJ

to the educated middle-class, does not act as a nightmare to their primitive minds. How the sex-life children are born into, conduces to the benefit of the tribe taken as a whole, can easily be judged from the rough account that follows. 831 [842]

Santal children, as may be easily imagined from their humble economic life, sleep with their parents. The more affluent of the house-holders sleep on a *khatia* with their wives. The children sleep nearby. One may wonder how the short space of a *khatia* (width about two cubits) permits such a sleep for two adults, but the answer is, the husband and wife do thus sleep. The minimum age for children for thus sleeping near their parents was given as 12, while the maximum was fixed at 16. 864 613

The people being poor, the accommodation for sleeping is extremely limited. Knowing how even western sex-psychologists have asserted that there are few children who have not witnessed their parents copulating, we have every reason to believe that Santal children have ample opportunities of watching the primal scene in their parental bed. It is not a matter for surprise that the sex-instinct sprouts very early in children; of course the first manifestations are unconscious.

We have evidence at our disposal which shows that in a childrens' play named "Sakam bàhu jamai" (Bride and bride-groom of leaves), marriages are 864 857

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

way : the husband is made to stand facing the sun on one leg (generally the left). He has a cloth round his neck each end of which is held in the hand along with three sal leaves. Then taking the name of Sin-Bonga he tears the sal leaves in token of separation and upsets a brass pot full of water. This is repeated by the wife also.[1]

Birth and Naming Ceremony : When the Santal woman becomes pregnant, she and her husband observe certain taboos. The husband during his wife's pregnancy never kills any animal, nor participates in any funeral ceremony and does not come in contact with any dead body. The pregnant woman during the evening very rarely comes out of the house, she never crosses any streamlet, she does not weep when any death occurs of her relations. On the day of the moon-eclipse she does not come out of the room. She should not sit on the verandah with her hair or her cloth hanging down on the courtyard side. All these taboos signify that the Santals have a strong belief that malevolent spirits or witches do mischief to the pregnant women.

The Santals believe that after ten months the women give birth. When the labour pain starts the pregnant woman is confined in a room, which is generally a corner of the house or a portion of the verandah partitioned with bamboo and leaves. At birth, an experienced elderly woman of the village or of the adjoining village officiates as midwife. No one is allowed to remain there except one or two female relatives of the pregnant woman. After birth, the umbilical cord is

[1] There is a belief that if the sal leaves are not fully torn or the lota not wholly emptied then the couple must again come together.

St Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

CHAPTER 10

BIRTH AND INITIATION

858 The birth of a child is an occasion for rejoicing, and the event is announced by saying: "The new relation has arrived." Children are spoken of as the gift of *Ca'ndo*, which indicates that they are considered to be assets to the family. It is true that boys are rather more welcome than girls; every family desires that the first child should be a boy who will ensure the survival of that [428] particular family within the clan. A boy can inherit his father's lands, and one day he will be required to assist at his father's funeral ceremonies and perpetuate the worship of his own ancestors. Girls are welcomed, though not to the same degree. Through their marriages they will in due course extend the range of the family's relationships, but they bring but a small economic return to their parents, and the bride price received at marriage is not comparable to the expense of bringing them to maturity. Where a family consists of both boys and girls in equal proportion the girls are well treated, and when later on they go to other homes their places will be filled by daughters-in-law. When, on the other hand, a woman gives birth to a succession of daughters she is likely to feel the displeasure of her husband's relations. A third or fourth daughter born into a home where the husband's mother reigns supreme does not enjoy much prospect of survival. Children are valued from the first because of their potential working ability. A villager, on hearing that a birth has taken place, responds at once with the question: "What is it? Does it carry on the shoulder (a boy) or does it carry on the head (a girl)?" Or he may say: "Is it a hunter or is it a water carrier?"[1]

• 842 [718] [576] [782] [595] There are Hindu shrines in the area to which Santal women resort along with others when other means of securing the birth of a longed-for child have proved of no avail. A spirit who can grant the boon of children resides near the village of Raniband at the summit of a hill which rises abruptly from the plain and is the highest point in the whole area. Cases have been reported of Santal man and wife making the climb together in order to present an offering. In most cases, however, the husband preserves an air of indifference; if his wife fails to bear a child he is

[1] Another way of referring to the sex of children, though not at the time of birth, is for a parent to say: "I have three *iri* and three *erha*", which signifies three boys and three girls. *Iri* is a cultivated millet (*Panicum crusgalli*, L.) and *erha* is a cultivated grain (*Setaria italica*, Kunth).

[195] [192]

St Culshaw M-S (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

842 • [595]

persuaded to take a second wife. Sometimes he may not be reluctant to take such a step for reasons quite unconnected with the need for children, though usually he is. In addition to supernatural aids there are known to be remedies for ensuring conception, and these are sought from the individuals to whom they belong. The secrets of these remedies are closely guarded. Bodding[1] has listed a number of those commonly known. My friend Binu was in possession of a remedy which had to be taken by the patient during a menstruation period and which ensured the birth of a boy. "No one", he said, "would ask for a medicine to ensure the birth of a girl."

847 [842] [789]

Conversely, amulets are worn as contraceptives, and two different methods are used to induce abortion. One of these is to take drugs orally and the other is the highly dangerous method of piercing the womb with a stick inserted through the vagina. I have heard of the latter method being followed only by girls who wished to escape detection and who therefore could not ask anyone for medicine. Married women who resort to abortion are usually those who have already given birth to a large number of children. In one case which had fatal results for the mother she wished to avoid having a seventh child; another attempt which resulted in a serious illness for the mother, but which was otherwise successful, was made by a woman who had already had ten children.

842 843 [192]

Santals are fully aware of the connection between coitus and conception. From the time when pregnancy is suspected the child begins to exert its influence over the life of the home. A pregnant woman is called *poati*, this being the common Bengali term, but here too the Santal love of figurative speech finds full play, and other common ways of referring to pregnancy are to speak of a "full body" or a "heavy body" or to say that the woman is now "two souls". Many of the restrictions enjoined on the woman are due to the physical dangers that surround her during the period and at its climax. These dangers may be brought about not only through natural causes but also by the action of malignant spirits. Thus it is dangerous for a pregnant woman to go anywhere when the sun is directly overhead, nor does she go anywhere alone at sunset. She should not cross a river, though some of my informants affirmed that this prohibition applies only during a first pregnancy. She may not sit on the narrow ledge surrounding the house with her legs

[1] *Memoirs of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. X, *Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore*, Pt. II, "Santal Medicine".